

1. The Life-Span of Buddha-Sāsana

Ven. Mahākassapa extended the Buddha's Dispensation to 5000 years by the First Buddhist Council:

*"Saṅgītipariyosāne cassa – "idaṃ mahākassapaṭṭherena dasabalassa sāsanaṃ pañcavassasahassaparimāṇakālaṃ pavattanasamatthaṃ kata"nti saṅjātappamodā sādhuṃkāraṃ viya dadamānā ayaṃ mahāpathavi udakapariyantaṃ katvā anekappakāraṃ kampi sarikampi sampakampi sampavedhi, anekāni ca acchariyāni pāturahesuṃ."*¹

English tr. of the same text in <i>Abhidhamma Piṭaka</i> Commentary ²	English tr. of the corresponding text in Chinese <i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i> Commentary ³
And at the conclusion of the Rehearsal the great earth quaked (up to the limits of the water) repeatedly, violently, with a vertical upheaval everywhere;	Thereupon the great Earth, like a man overjoyed, shouted in praise: "Very good, very good !", and even upto the hell (lit. a fountain with yellow flames) shook and quaked in six ways and exhibited various kinds of miracles. This is called the First Council of the Five hundred Elder Arhats.
And various wonders manifested themselves, as though giving congratulations with well-felt delight at the thought:	
'The religion of the Buddha of the Ten Powers has thus, by the Elder Mahākassapa, been made capable of lasting a period of five thousand years.'	

From the two translations above we can see that the mention about lengthening the Buddha's teachings five times (from the original 1000 years) didn't find its place in the Chinese text.

In this little article, I am not going to discuss the original texts that led to the 5000 years. Rather, I would like to share my opinion regarding the logical possibility of lengthening those 5000 years.

Now suppose that a car with four wheels may go hundred thousand km before its wheels become too damaged to continue. If there were six wheels, it could certainly go further. With eight, ten, etc. the length of travel by the car would certainly increase more and more.

¹ *Sīlakkhandhavagga-Atthakathā - Ganthārambhakathā* (at the end) (MMp.1.26), *Vinayapiṭake Pārājikakaṇḍa-aṭṭhakathā (paṭhamo bhāgo) - Ganthārambhakathā* (MMp.1.23), *Abhidhammapiṭake Atthasālinī nāma Dhammasaṅgaṇī-aṭṭhakathā - Nidānakathā* (MMp.28) .

² *"The Expositor (Atthasālinī) – Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, The First Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka"*, Vols. I, II, tr. by Pe Maung Tin, PTS, London, 1976; pp.34-35.

³ *"Shan-Chien-P'i-P'o-Sha – A Chinese version of Saṅghabhadra of SAMANTAPĀSĀDIKĀ, Commentary on Pali Vinaya translated into English for the first time"*, by Prof. P.V. Bapat, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1970, p.16 .

Well, so if one single Buddhist Council could quintuple (i.e. make five times more) the duration of the Buddha's teachings, then what to say about the Second Buddhist Council, Third Buddhist Council, Fourth Buddhist Council, Fifth Buddhist Council, and the Sixth Buddhist Council? All of these council contributed important decisions and Pāli texts to the Buddha's teachings, so that the essence is well protected against the vicissitudes of time.

The Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) chronicle *Mahāvamsa* (chapter 3, verse 38), also supports the Pāli Commentaries - "*Mahākassapatherena, idaṃ sugatasāsanam; Pañcavassasahassāni, samattham vattane katam.*" = "This Dispensation of the Rightly Gone (/the Buddha), has been made enough strong to stay for five thousand years."

2. Life-span records in *Tipiṭaka*

Life-span of human beings is a seriously important issue for us, the humans. The longer the life-span, the more time we have to study, develop, and share with others. There is an account on the longest living people in the Buddha's time India. From that account it seems nobody had longer life-span than ven. Bākula.

<i>Araka Sutta Commentary (Dīgha Nikāya)</i>	English translation by monk Sarana
<i>Tattha visākhā upāsikā vīsavassasataṃ jīvati, tathā pokkharasāti brāhmaṇo, brahmāyu brāhmaṇo, selo brāhmaṇo, bāvariya brāhmaṇo, ānandatthero, mahākassapattheroti.</i>	There the lay-woman Visākhā lived 120 years, similarly the Brahmin Pokkharasāti, the Brahmin Brahmāyu, the Brahmin Sela, the Brahmin Bāvariya, the Elder Ānanda, (and) the Elder Mahākassapa.
<i>Anuruddhatthero pana vassasatañceva paṇṇāsañca vassāni,</i>	However, the Elder Anuruddha (lived) 150 years,
<i>bākulatthero vassasatañceva saṭṭhi ca vassāni.</i>	And the Elder Bākula (lived) 160 years.
<i>Ayaṃ sabba dīghāyuko.</i>	Those are all (humans) of long life-span.
<i>Sopi dve vassasatāni na jīvati.⁴</i>	Even they didn't live (even) two hundred years.

In Myanmar some people believe, that the wizards Bo Bo Aung and Bo Min Khaung, both born hundreds of years ago, are still alive – and they attained their deathlessness by recollecting the qualities of the Buddha. Some may simply change bodies without dying – either selecting an already dead body or simply by selective rebirth, and some may create completely new body after burning this body by psychic powers. Educated monks however do not accept the idea that the wizards would survive for centuries.

May all beings be happy,

monk Saraṇa

⁴ *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā - Mahāvaggaṭṭhakathā - 1. Mahāpadānasuttavaṇṇanā - Āyuparicchedavaṇṇanā, Aṅguttaranikāye Sattakanipāta-ṭīkā - 7. Mahāvaggo - 10. Arakasuttavaṇṇanā*